Background: AcademicMerit, LLC is a Portland-based developer of online learning, instruction, and assessment tools targeting English-Language Arts in grades 7-12. Literary Companion® provides in-depth study of classic and contemporary literature—with an emphasis on vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing—and has been used by a number of Maine schools. Assessments21® offers classroom-based common assessments in reading comprehension and written analysis—using short stories, poems, and non-fiction texts. Together, both programs provide teachers and administrators with real-time access to assessment data in these key skill areas. (For more information on the programs and the company, please visit www.academicmerit.com.)

During the '09-'10 school year, Dr. David Silvernail at USM's Center for Educational Policy, Applied Research and Evaluation (CEPARE) conducted a small study of Literary Companion using schools in Falmouth, Scarborough, Cumberland, Poland, Wells-Ogunquit, and Hallowell that produced very promising findings. (The full study is available on the company's homepage). Simultaneously, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were introduced—and have now been adopted by 43 states. It is anticipated that Maine will officially adopt the CCSS during the current legislative session.

Purpose: The purpose of this study, therefore, is essentially a state-wide expansion of last year's study, but with a specific focus on the ability of AcademicMerit's suite of online tools to help teachers align their curriculum to the CCSS, produce assessment data aligned with the CCSS—and serve as a model of the sort of "interim" assessments planned as part of the Comprehensive Assessment System being developed to measure student performance on the CCSS beginning in 2014.

Benefits: This study will be the first of its kind in the United States, further raising Maine's national profile as a leader in education and educational technology. It is intended to provide the following benefits:

- **Students** will engage with challenging literary and non-fiction texts, then receive timely measurements of their ability to analyze the texts.

- **Teachers** will gain experience working with CCSS-aligned academic content, assessment vehicles, and data-analysis tools designed to facilitate differentiated instruction.

- **Administrators** will gain real-time access to their students' assessment data, along with the ability to analyze that data in multiple ways.

- **MLTI and CEPARE** will be able to evaluate the ability of both the state's laptop initiative and this suite of online tools to facilitate implementation of the CCSS in Maine.

- **AcademicMerit** will gain the opportunity to test its suite of online tools for this purpose, while at the same time collaborating with Maine's teachers and administrators to develop a CCSS-aligned data-reporting system that meets schools' needs.

Dates: This study will occur during the second semester of the current ('10-'11) school year, primarily from late February through early April.

**Technological
Requirements:** Students must have sufficient access to computers with high-speed Internet access.

**Teacher
Requirements:** Teachers agreeing to participate in this study must be willing to complete all of the following tasks:

- Respond to a preliminary online questionnaire.

- Administer an Assessments21 (A21) assessment. *The assessment will be specified by the study, depending upon grade level. The reading-comprehension portion will be scored automatically; the essays will be submitted for double-blind scoring by AcademicMerit using its Centralized Online Scoring System™ (COSS) and its Comprehensive Writing Rubric, with scores returned to students and teachers within days of submission.*

- Complete an online questionnaire about the initial experience with A21.

- If covering one of the texts offered by Literary Companion (LC) during the period of the study, use LC in its entirety for the text with at least one class, including submitting final essays for double-blind scoring by AcademicMerit. (For a full description of the program, and a list of available texts, please see academicmerit.com.)

- Complete an online questionnaire about the experience with LC.

- Undergo 60-90 minutes of online training to become a reader/scorer of essays using AcademicMerit's COSS. *This training will involve scoring a series of anchor essays so as to calibrate one's scoring with the expectations of the Comprehensive Writing Rubric.*

- Administer a second A21 assessment. *Unlike the first A21 assessment, however, the essays from this one will be scored by participating teachers.*

- Using COSS and the Comprehensive Writing Rubric, score a minimum of double the number essays of one's students participating in the study.

- Complete an online questionnaire about the two experiences with A21.

- Provide feedback to AcademicMerit and the researcher, as solicited, regarding the development of a data-reporting system aligned directly with the CCSS.

- Provide final feedback and/or participate in a focus group at the completion of the study.

**Time
Commitment:** Each A21 assessment takes only a single class period. LC use would mirror a typical literature unit. Scoring of essays using COSS will take a few hours. Questionnaires are short. Other time (such as conferencing with students on A21 scores) will be at the discretion of the participating teacher.

Compensation: For their responses to the questionnaires and their scoring of student essays, participating teachers will receive $250.00 from AcademicMerit.

**Administrator
Requirements:** Administrators are required to insure compliance of participating teachers in the study, and to provide periodic feedback to AcademicMerit on the development of a CCSS-aligned data system.